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ABSTRACT

Several research studies have looked at Japanese-American interaction with other ethnic groups in Hawaii. A study by McCardless and Hoyt, "Sex, Ethnicity, and Play Preferences of Preschool Children," reveals that children in Hawaii base their choice of friends on racial distinctions. This is due, however, not to racial hostility or discrimination but to a tendency to engage in more communication with those with whom one has most in common. Vinacke, in his study, "Stereotyping Among National-Racial Groups in Hawaii," concludes that stereotyping cannot be equated with prejudice; it is more a reflection of "truth" than racial prejudice. In "Some Observations Regarding Haole-Japanese Marriages in Hawaii," Nagoshi and Nishimura note that the attitudes of Japanese- Americans are changing from almost universal objection to mixed marriages to increasing acceptance or at least tolerance. Keinecke's study "Pidgin English in Hawaii" shows that those who speak pidgin find that otherwise insurmountable obstacles can be overcome in interracial contacts. In his study "The ILWU as a Force for Interracial Unity in Hawaii," Thompson discusses how the unified labor force which was created by the ILWU brought varied races and peoples together. It seems that Hawaii is not so much a community of racial distinction as one of cultural pluralism. (CFM)

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A MODEL OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION: THE INTERACTION OF JAPANESE AND OTHER ETHNIC GROUPS IN HAWAII

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A Model of Intercultural Communication: The Interaction of Japanese and Other Ethnic Groups in Hawaii

Judged from the perspective of intercultural communication and race relations in other states, Hawaii could be viewed quite realistically as a racial paradise. Where else, in the American system, do racial groups interact so freely, with so little overt hostility and aggression? Where else can one go to a football game, a theater or a restaurant and see so many different races, and mixture of races, so unconsciously rubbing shoulders? Indeed, it would appear that those who come to Hawaii seeking an answer to racial hostilities, or escaping the explosive situation on the mainland, could reasonably find an inter-racial paradise.

It is inevitable, however, that despite the existence of this favorable milieu, racial and cultural conflicts occur. It is possible for the visitor to Hawaii to be struck by racial prejudice, have his dreams of Aloha shattered, and return to his mainland home convinced that Hawaii is as bad as any other state in the union. Undoubtedly, racial discrimination exists between the haole and the "local," between the Samoan immigrant and the native Hawaiian, between the Japanese American and the Filipino American, between the Hawaiian and the Japanese American, ad nauseum. Yet, given that Hawaii is an island, surrounded by the Pacific Ocean and situated over 2,400 miles away from the West Coast, can one say that these conflicts reflect the same type of racial animosity found on the mainland? What are the personal dynamics behind inter-group relation in Hawaii, the nature of intercultural communication as it exist in the Islands? How do Island people attempt to work out liveable situations with their neighbors, cutting racial and cultural barriers?

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the Japanese American interaction vis-a-vis other ethnic groups in Hawaii. The intention is to present several research studies which discuss this interaction in terms of intercultural communications and race relations. It must be mentioned, however, that in presenting a series of studies dealing with intercultural relations, one walks a very dangerous tightrope. To select studies which present Hawaii as a polyanna state where everyone loves the Japanese Americans, and the Japanese Americans love everyone else, would be idealistically wonderful, but academically unsound. On the other hand, to stress the racial hostility and prejudice among ethnic groups would do a serious disservice to the great majority of people in Hawaii who in their attitudes and behavior reflect a very genuine Aloha Spirit. One is admonished, therefore, to maintain a balance while reading this paper. Fanning racial fires when they are cooling embers is socially irresponsible and destructive, but by the same token, ignoring what is a reality, and always a potential danger, is equally irresponsible.

A most logical point to begin a discussion of interpersonal race relations in Hawaii is with children. Unlike the common assumption that childhood is a period of blissful ignorance studies have revealed that by the age of seven, and in some cases as early as three years old, children have learned the racial attitudes and differential treatment accorded those of other races from the larger community. One of the few studies which attempt to explain the dynamics of interpersonal racial relations among children in Hawaii was conducted by Boyd R. McCandless and June M. Hoyt. Their study, "Sex, Ethnicity, and Play Preferences of Preschool Children,"

describes the racial interactions and communication of 59 Oriental and Caucasian children over a three and a half month period. The results indicate that children in Hawaii pattern their choice of friends and playmates based on racial distinctions.

While this would suggest that among Japanese Americans and Non-Japanese Americans there is an early tendency towards non-interaction, one should be cautioned against concluding that this is evidence of discrimination or poor racial environments. McCandless and Hoyt point out that rather than discrimination as it is usually conceived, there is "some sort of 'comfort' differential by ethnic group."[1] Within every cultural group, and especially the Japanese American community, there are distinct lifestyles and patterns, which, while sometimes similar, are in many cases uniquely different. It becomes most natural then for children to communicate with playmates who understand and participate in the same kinds of activities, language, dress and diet. "In other words, children in one ethnic group do not actively avoid members of the other group, but differentially approach the members of their own group."[2]

The McCandless and Hoyt study suggests an important hypothesis useful to understanding the occurrence of "racial prejudice" in Hawaii. It is assumed by the racial integrationist that for true racial harmony to take place, racial groups must interact at a level of equality with other racial groups. However, this study makes the point that selective association is operative among ethnic groups. To engage in more communication with those with whom one has most in common is not at the same time an indication of racial hostility or discrimination. What the outside observer sees in Hawaii as a sign

of racial enclaves, clannishness or separation, might be the result of cultural communities differentiated by "comfort" level and not an accurate indication of racism.

It would be naive, however, to think that the nature of intercultural communication and race relations in Hawaii can be totally explained by McCandless and Hoyt. Ethnocentricism and the process of stereotyping are social forces which can not be taken lightly. Generated from other groups towards the Japanese American, and generated within the Japanese Americans toward other groups, subtle and covert signs of racial uneasiness are often expressed.

An example of some of the feeling which can occur is found in the study "Stereotyping Among National-Racial Groups in Hawaii: A Study in Ethnocentricism," by W. Edgar Vinacke. This study is an exploration into the complex question of stereotyping and racial prejudice in the Islands. It analyzes how one group stereotypes another group and how all of Hawaii's ethnic groups stereotype each other and themselves favorably and unfavorably.

For Vinacke, from outside of the Japanese American community, as well as within it, one can find expressions of both favorable and unfavorable stereotypes toward ethnic groups, whether they be Hawaiian, Filipino or any other group. Based on this finding, Vinacke raises a number of intriguing questions. He asks whether stereotyping is more a reflection of "truth" or racial prejudice. He also asks whether stereotyping and racial prejudice are equivalent. Vinacke suggests that perhaps stereotypes, though recognizably false when applied to an individual or group unconditionally, are in instances

representative of cultural differences among groups. Speaking in general terms of cultural patterns, perhaps Japanese Americans are on the whole "quiet" or "close-knit," the Hawaiian "easy-going" or "good-natured." Furthermore, whether these stereotypes are viewed as favorable or unfavorable is dependent on culturally individual interpretations. Therefore, a favorable notion of being "close-knit" for the Japanese American might become an unfavorable attitude of "clannishness" to the haole or Hawaiian.[3]

Vinacke also points out that even though ethnic groups in Hawaii stereotype each other, this can not serve as evidence of widespread racial animosity. For Vinacke, "it appears to be very dubious to equate stereotyping with prejudice."[4] Too little is known about the complex process of racial relations, especially in Hawaii, to establish at which point the recognition of racial differences and good-natured attitudes end, and racial hate and prejudice begins. For example, though the existence of ethnic jokes are widespread in Hawaii, are these jokes about racial groups indicative of a deep-seated racial unrest and hate, or a gentle release of inter-racial tension which help people to communicate and find humor with each other?

In context to these questions raised by Vinacke, an important point can be stressed about racial prejudice or stereotyping as they exist in Hawaii. Though ethnic jokes abound and subtle racial animosities are expressed, such differential attitudes are rarely exposed in physical violence or outright racial discrimination. The people in Hawaii who may so willingly stereotype other ethnic groups and their own, know that with rare exception, they are going to live next to, work with, and be friends to those who they so openly stereotype.

Because of an Island setting an unusual situation is created where what appears on the surface as hatred, ethnocentrism and animosity, is in actuality, attitudes which play a secondary role to the conditions of inter-racial living and dialogue.

Besides the integrating forces of the Island situation itself, other factors have defined the nature of Hawaii's racial interactions. The prevailing spirit of Aloha, which survives despite the strains of the past and present, the arts and music of the Islands, and the diversity of religions and folklores have all served to ameliorate ethnic relations and produce the compatible racial atmosphere in which Hawaii's people live.

Perhaps one of the most dramatic forces which has affected ethnic interactions in Hawaii is that of the ultimate interpersonal relationship: marriage. In the study "Some Observations Regarding Haole-Japanese Marriages in Hawaii," for example, Kunio Nagoshi and Charles Nishimura, comment on the adjustments, family difficulties and change in ethnic relations brought about by marriages between Haole men and local-born Japanese women. Initiated in the early fifties, this study analyzes a collection of statements made by couples of mixed marriages. The couples interviewed indicate that with one exception, each of them encountered "some form of opposition to the marriage that was expressed by one or more members of the wife's family."[5] Though the opposition to the marriage is many times too weak to stop the ceremonies, "in some instances, increasingly rare, Japanese parents in Hawaii have not only threatened but actually disowned children who have gone through with plans involving an intermarriage."[6]

Nagoshi and Nishimura believe that though resistance to intermarriage exists in Japanese American parents, the form of expression is changing from that of the Issei, first generation. While an Issei parent would oppose a marriage because it would bring shame to the family, Nisei or second generation parents stress the problems which an interracial couple would have, culturally and socially. Overall, however, "it seems that the continued assimilation of the Japanese group into the wider community has been influential in bringing about a general change in attitude toward intermarriage, from one of almost universal objection toward one of increasing acceptance or at least toleration."[7]

Another major social influence which has determined the course of Hawaii's intercultural communication and race relations has been the language spoken by Island people. The facilitation of interpersonal relations across ethnic lines demands a common language, a lingua franca, so that a common ground of understanding can be established. In Hawaii, among ethnic groups, the lingua franca has been Island Dialect, or pidgin. Historically despised by educators and assimilationists, much beloved by those who speak it, pidgin English has in some cases been a tool to transcend the ethnic barriers in a multi-ethnic community and in other cases an obstacle to interracial relations.

The study of pidgin's influence on Hawaii's community has been undertaken by a number of social linguists. One of the pioneers in this area has been John Reinecke. His study "'Pidgin English' in Hawaii: A Local Study in the Sociology of Language," though conducted in 1938 still has relevancy today. The study points out that pidgin

is a highly connotative language, a "language of intimacy," which has many varied and valuable emotional meanings for the user. Unlike Standard English which is largely denotative, with scientifically objective definitions, pidgin is a mixture of many languages, with a history tied to the history of Hawaii. It is a language which sprung from the multi-racial plantation experience when interracial communication was a financial necessity.[8]

In many ways the term "local," which largely defines the Japanese American's identity in Hawaii, is linked with speaking pidgin. Those who cannot speak the Island Dialect are recognized as outsiders to the ethnic communities. Those who speak pidgin find that many otherwise insurmountable obstacles can be overcome in interracial contacts.

For Reinecke, pidgin is not only a language of interracial acceptance, but also a language expressive of racial stratification. In the past, the pidgin speaker was made to feel inferior, and show deference to the Standard English speaker as represented by the haole. Many times social mobility was achieved only through the purging of the Island dialect by the non-white, cutting his ties from his ethnic group. Bilingualism, and even tri-lingualism in the case of children whose parents were speakers of a foreign language, became educational and perhaps emotional handicaps to many children who grew up in a community which was hostile to their speech. Presently a re-evaluation of the role pidgin and Standard English play in the lives of Island people is needed. Reinecke's study, however, gives a good foundation for understanding the dynamic ramifications behind the usage of local dialect in Hawaii.

In addition to the Island language of pidgin, the labor unions of Hawaii have also had a decided effect on the nature of Island race relations. In Hawaii prior to the 1950's, the policy of the plantation owners was to keep the races apart so as to prevent a unified labor force from being created. The inability to cross racial barriers and gain confidence interracially for the Japanese American or any other group, was one factor which hampered interethnic relations in Hawaii for many years. When the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, the ILWU, began organizing to counter the power of the plantation establishment by unionizing all ethnic workers, regardless of race, the effect was to significantly change the nature of Island interaction.

The necessities of political clout demanded that the old patterns of racial separatism give way. Unity among ethnic groups was required if Hawaii's workers were to achieve any bargaining power or autonomy. An excellent account of this struggle is David Thompson's study "The ILWU as a Force for Interracial Unity in Hawaii."[9] Thompson's discussion of the early attempts by the union to bring the races together under a single organization, characterized by a leadership which would be multi-racial, embraces a historical purview which provides for a more accurate understanding of Hawaii's racial patterns. In context to the plantation policy of "divide and rule," the unified unionism brought varied races and peoples together in a manner different than casual contacts. The economic betterment and survival of each worker depended on his ability to get along with and support a worker of another race. In many ways, the dynamics of the political and economic Hawaii of today, has its roots in the post World War II

era when the traditional manner of relating to closed ethnic groups became obsolete to the demands of the time. Separatism to the excess, simply would mean suicide --- at the polls, in business, or working in the field.

Understanding the various social forces vibrant in the Islands, perhaps one could say, then, that the Hawaii of today is not so much a community of racial distinction but more a culturally and pluralistically compatible environment for intercultural communication and multi-ethnic contacts. While one could recognize social currents which lead to racial tension and conflicts, the perceptive observer should be able to view these occurrences of racial animostiy in context with the stronger, more democratic and equalitarian forces in Hawaii. Indeed, the study of the interaction which the Japanese American has had and will continue to have with other ethnic groups, as well as the study of the social forces which characterize the Islands' interethnic relations, suggest that the people of Hawaii are involved in an extremely vital human experiment.

How do so many different kinds of cultural and racial groups, each under a unique type of social condition and pressure, live compatibly on a series of small islands? Can the desires to maintain distinct cultural patterns and lifestyles be adapted to the contingencies of interracial harmony? Can lessons in human behavior be learned so that other areas with less racial mixture but with more racial hostility benefit from what happens in Hawaii? And finally, what role will the Japanese American play, as well as other ethnic groups, in defining the racial future?

Footnotes

1. Boyd R. McCandless and June M. Hoyt, "Sex, Ethnicity, and Play Preferences of Preschool Children," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, Vol. 62, No. 2 (1961), 684.

2. Ibid.

3. W. Edgar Vinacke, "Stereotyping Among National-Racial Groups in Hawaii: A Study in Ethnocentrism," The Journal of Social Psychology, 30 (1949), 269-270.

4. Ibid., p. 289.

5. Kunio Nagoshi and Charles Nishimura, "Some Observations Regarding Haole-Japanese Marriages in Hawaii," Social Process in Hawaii, Vol. XVIII (1954), 57.

6. Ibid., p. 59.

7. Ibid., p. 65.

8. John E. Reinecke, "'Pidgin English' in Hawaii: A Local Study in the Sociology of Language," American Journal of Sociology, Vol. XLIII, No. 5 (March 1938), 778-789.

9. David E. Thompson, "The ILWU as a Force for Interracial Unity in Hawaii," Social Process in Hawaii, Vol. XV (1951), 32-43.